

News Release

Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office
300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96850
808.792.9400
<http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands>



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Contact: Ken Foote, 808.792.9535 or 282.9442

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Draft Habitat Conservation Plan for Kawailoa Wind Power Facility Available for Public Comment

Comments Accepted Until October 11, 2011

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces the availability, for public review, of a draft Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and incidental take permit application submitted by Kawailoa Wind Power LLC, a subsidiary of First Wind LLC, and our draft Environmental Assessment (EA) addressing the proposed project. The proposed 70-megawatt wind power facility is located approximately 4 miles northeast of Haleiwa town on the north shore of the island of O'ahu, Hawai'i. Kawailoa Wind Power LLC developed the draft HCP in coordination with the Service and the Hawai'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) as part of the application for an incidental take permit for species protected under the Endangered Species Act. The draft HCP and EA are available for public review and comment for 45 days.

The draft HCP describes how Kawailoa Wind Power LLC will – to the maximum extent practicable – avoid, minimize, and mitigate the potential incidental take of protected species that may result from the construction and operation of the wind power facility on Kamehameha Schools' Kawailoa Plantation lands.

An incidental take permit is required when non-Federal activities are likely to result in "take" of a threatened or endangered species while carrying out otherwise lawful activities. "Take," as defined by the Federal Endangered Species Act, means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct. Harm may include significant habitat modification that results in death or injury to a listed species by impairing behavioral patterns such as breeding, feeding or sheltering.

Kawailoa Wind Power LLC is requesting a permit because incidental take of six federally listed species may result from the construction and operation of the wind power facility. The species affected are the endangered Hawaiian moorhen or 'ālae 'ula, Hawaiian coot or 'ālae ke'oke'o, Hawaiian duck or koloa, Hawaiian stilt or ae'o, Hawaiian hoary bat or 'ōpe'ape'a, and the threatened Newell's shearwater or 'a'o.

The proposed facility will consist of 30 wind turbine generators, a maintenance building, an electrical substation, a battery energy storage system, underground electrical collection system, an overhead transmission line to connect the substation to the Hawaiian Electric Company transmission line, two permanent meteorological monitoring towers, and service roads to connect the new turbines and other facilities to existing highways. Installation, operation, and maintenance of up to four microwave dish antennae on two existing Hawaiian Telcom facilities near the summit of Mt. Ka'ala are also part of the proposed project. The applicant has also applied for a State of Hawai'i incidental take license pursuant to Hawai'i State law for the six federally listed species, as well as the State-listed short eared owl or pueo. The permit authorizes the incidental take of the listed species for 20 years.

Four endangered waterbirds, the Hawaiian moorhen, Hawaiian duck, Hawaiian coot, and Hawaiian stilt are known to exist in wetland locations adjacent to the proposed project site, and they are at risk of injury and mortality from wind generating operations (collisions with wind turbine generators). Threatened Newell's shearwaters are also at risk of injury and mortality from collision with the wind turbines and their attraction to

artificial lighting that can result in disorientation and subsequent fallout due to exhaustion. Both adult seabirds and fledglings can collide with tall buildings, towers, power lines, and other tall structures while flying at night between their nesting colonies and at-sea foraging areas.

Kawailoa Wind Power LLC is proposing mitigation measures on the islands of O‘ahu, Maui, Kaho‘olawe and Kaua‘i that will include predator control, fencing, wetland and upland habitat restoration, and vegetation maintenance for the protection of Hawaiian waterbirds, seabirds and the Hawaiian hoary bat. The applicant is proposing to restore Ukoa Pond on O‘ahu by constructing a fence, removing ungulates, predator control and enhancing degraded wetland habitat to benefit Hawaiian waterbirds. At the same site, restored open water will benefit foraging Hawaiian hoary bats while the planting of trees will provide roost sites for the bat. Mitigation measures may include restoration and management such as fencing, ungulate removal, and predator control of forested habitat in the Ko‘olau Range on O‘ahu or on the island of Maui for Hawaiian hoary bat conservation. Seabird mitigation will include the development and testing of a self-resetting cat trap to be utilized at a Newell’s shearwater colony on Kaua‘i; development of translocation protocols to benefit the Newell’s shearwater recovery efforts; and contributions to a restoration fund for predator control, social attraction and potential translocation of Newell’s shearwaters to Kaho‘olawe. This HCP incorporates adaptive management provisions to allow for modifications to the aforementioned mitigation and monitoring measures as new information is obtained.

There are no known nesting colonies of Newell’s shearwater on O‘ahu. Biologists believe the O‘ahu population is very low due to the many threats (predators, tall buildings, powerlines, and artificial lighting) encountered on the island. Seabird mitigation is being proposed on the island of Kaua‘i (where the majority of the species’ population resides) in order to provide the greatest benefit to the species.

The draft EA considers the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the proposed action of permit issuance, including measures that will be implemented to minimize and mitigate such impacts. The EA contains an analysis of three alternatives: (1) issuance of the incidental take permit to Kawailoa Wind on the basis of the activities described in the proposed HCP (Proposed Action); (2) evaluates the potential impacts of issuing an the incidental take permit and approving an HCP for the alternate communications site; and the (3) No Action alternative (no permit issuance and no measures by the applicant to reduce or eliminate the take of covered species). The draft EA also identifies additional alternatives that were considered but not fully analyzed, as they did not meet the purpose and need of the Proposed Action.

All comments from interested parties must be received on or before October 11, 2011. Written comments should be submitted to: Loyal Mehrhoff, Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, 300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 3-122, Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96850. Comments may also be sent via facsimile to 808 792-9580.

The Service will evaluate the permit application, associated documents, and submitted comments to determine whether the application meets the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act regulations and section 10 (a) of the Endangered Species Act.

Documents are posted on the Service’s website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>. Copies and additional information may also be obtained from Aaron Nadig at 808-792-9400, or by writing to the address listed above.

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